

# Rules of the Game

## Animals (Part One)

By Skip Williams



When player characters seek ways to improve their capabilities, they can do worse than purchasing an animal or two. Animals can carry gear (or loot), act as mounts, and serve as scouts, guardians, trackers, or fighting allies. The right animal might do all of these things. Some characters, such as **rangers** and **druids**, come more or less pre-equipped with companion animals (though rangers must wait awhile before acquiring animal companions), but others must purchase, and perhaps train, their animals.

Unfortunately, animals usually complicate things when they enter play. What, exactly, can an animal do? How will it react when a nasty monster jumps out of the weeds? Just what kind of creature is an animal companion anyway, and what does it bring to your table? This series considers all these questions and more. *Rules of the Game* already examined [mounts](#) in detail, so we'll concentrate on companion animals here.

### Animal Basics

Animals are best treated as **nonplayer characters** that act according to their instincts unless someone successfully orders them to do something else. The rules give little guidance about how animals act when not commanded, and we'll deal with that issue in Part Three. For the moment, let's concentrate on what you must do to get an animal to do what you want.

From pages 74-75 of the *Player's Handbook*:

#### HANDLE ANIMAL (CHA; TRAINED ONLY)

Use this skill to drive a team of horses pulling a wagon over rough terrain, to teach a dog to guard, or to teach a tyrannosaurus to "speak" on your command.

**Check:** The DC depends on what you are trying to do.

Task	Handle Animal DC
Handle an animal	10
"Push" an animal	25
Teach an animal a trick	15 or 20[1]
Train an animal for a general purpose	15 or 20[1]
Rear a wild animal	15 + HD of animal

[1] See the specific trick or purpose below.

General Purpose	DC	General Purpose	DC
Combat riding	20	Hunting	20

Fighting	20	Performance	15
Guarding	20	Riding	15
Heavy labor	15		

*Handle an Animal:* This task involves commanding an animal to perform a task or trick that it knows. For instance, to command a trained attack dog to attack a foe requires a DC 10 Handle Animal check. If the animal is wounded or has taken any nonlethal damage or ability score damage, the DC increases by 2. If your check succeeds, the animal performs the task or trick on its next action.

*"Push" an Animal:* To push an animal means to get it to perform a task or trick that it doesn't know but is physically capable of performing. This category also covers making an animal perform a forced march or forcing it to hustle for more than 1 hour between sleep cycles (see Chapter 9: Adventuring). If the animal is wounded or has taken any nonlethal damage or ability score damage, the DC increases by 2. If your check succeeds, the animal performs the task or trick on its next action.

*Train an Animal for a Purpose:* Rather than teaching an animal individual tricks, you can simply train it for a general purpose. Essentially, an animal's purpose represents a preselected set of known tricks that fit into a common scheme, such as guarding or heavy labor. The animal must meet all the normal prerequisites for all tricks included in the training package. If the package includes more than three tricks, the animal must have an Intelligence score of 2.

An animal can be trained for only one general purpose, though if the creature is capable of learning additional tricks (above and beyond those included in its general purpose), it may do so. Training an animal for a purpose requires fewer checks than teaching individual tricks does, but no less time. At your DM's option, you may be able to train an animal for a purpose that isn't mentioned here.

**Combat Riding (DC 20):** An animal trained to bear a rider into combat knows the tricks attack, come, defend, down, guard, and heel. Training an animal for combat riding takes six weeks. You may also "upgrade" an animal trained for riding to one trained for combat riding by spending three weeks and making a successful DC 20 Handle Animal check. The new general purpose and tricks completely replace the animal's previous purpose and any tricks it once knew. Warhorses and riding dogs (see the *Monster Manual*) are already trained to bear riders into combat, and they don't require any additional training for this purpose.

**Fighting (DC 20):** An animal trained to engage in combat knows the tricks attack, down, and stay. Training an animal for fighting takes three weeks.

**Guarding (DC 20):** An animal trained to guard knows the tricks attack, defend, down, and guard. Training an animal for guarding takes four weeks.

**Heavy Labor (DC 15):** An animal trained for heavy labor knows the tricks come and work. Training an animal for heavy labor takes two weeks.

**Hunting (DC 20):** An animal trained for hunting knows the tricks attack, down, fetch, heel, seek, and track. Training an animal for hunting takes six weeks.

**Performance (DC 15):** An animal trained for performance knows the tricks come, fetch, heel, perform, and stay. Training an animal for performance takes five weeks.

**Riding (DC 15):** An animal trained to bear a rider knows the tricks come, heel, and stay. Training an

animal for riding takes three weeks.

**Rear a Wild Animal:** To rear an animal means to raise a wild creature from infancy so that it becomes domesticated. A handler can rear as many as three creatures of the same kind at once. A successfully domesticated animal can be taught tricks at the same time it's being raised, or it can be taught as a domesticated animal later.

**Action:** Varies. Handling an animal is a move action, while pushing an animal is a full-round action. (A druid or ranger can handle her animal companion as a free action or push it as a move action.) For tasks with specific time frames noted above, you must spend half this time (at the rate of 3 hours per day per animal being handled) working toward completion of the task before you attempt the Handle Animal check. If the check fails, your attempt to teach, rear, or train the animal fails and you need not complete the teaching, rearing, or training time. If the check succeeds, you must invest the remainder of the time to complete the teaching, rearing, or training. If the time is interrupted or the task is not followed through to completion, the attempt to teach, rear, or train the animal automatically fails.

**Try Again:** Yes, except for rearing an animal.

**Special:** You can use this skill on a creature with an Intelligence score of 1 or 2 that is not an animal, but the DC of any such check increases by 5. Such creatures have the same limit on tricks known as animals do. The *Monster Manual* provides information on teaching or training other kinds of creatures as appropriate.

A druid or ranger gains a +4 circumstance bonus on Handle Animal checks involving her animal companion. In addition, a druid's or ranger's animal companion knows one or more bonus tricks, which don't count against the normal limit on tricks known and don't require any training time or Handle Animal checks to teach. If you have the Animal Affinity feat, you get a +2 bonus on Handle Animal checks.

**Synergy:** If you have 5 or more ranks in Handle Animal, you get a +2 bonus on Ride checks and wild empathy checks.

**Untrained:** If you have no ranks in Handle Animal, you can use a Charisma check to handle and push domestic animals, but you can't teach, rear, or train animals. A druid or ranger with no ranks in Handle Animal can use a Charisma check to handle and push her animal companion, but she can't teach, rear, or train other nondomestic animals.

The rules given in the Handle Animal skill define what animals can do during encounters. You make Handle Animal **checks** to control a trained animal during an encounter -- untrained animals act independently unless you can use a **spell** or other ability to gain control over them. You can find the Handle Animal skill description on pages 74-75 in the *Player's Handbook*, but here's an overview, along with a few additional notes and comments:

- An animal usually does not obey commands or do anything useful for a **character** unless it has received training to perform one or more tricks.

The tricks an animal knows define what it can do on a character's behalf. You can attempt to get an animal to perform a trick it does not know.

By definition, an animal has an Intelligence score of 1 or 2. An animal can learn three tricks per point of **Intelligence** it has. Teaching an animal a trick takes at least one week of work and a Handle Animal check. A

trainer can work with multiple animals, but the trainer must spend at least 3 hours a day working with each animal. For example, working with three animals requires 9 hours of work each day.

You can save some time by training an animal for general purpose instead of teaching it individual tricks. A general purpose is a set of tricks with a common theme. You teach the animal all the tricks in the set at once, but each trick counts against the total number of tricks the animal can learn. You can train an animal for only one general purpose; if a general purpose contains 4 or more tricks, the animal must have an Intelligence score of 2 to learn it.

The rules don't say so, but an animal you train must be fairly tame and must trust you. Wild or fearful animals do not learn anything unless you can calm them and develop a rapport with them.

See the Handle Animal skill description for more notes about training animals.

- An animal usually does not do anything during an encounter unless you give it a command by making a Handle Animal check.

Giving a command is move **action** for you if you order the animal to perform a trick it knows, and the check **DC** is 10. You can command an animal to perform a trick it does not know, provided that the animal is physically capable of performing the trick. Doing so is a full-round action, and the DC is 25 (the DC for "pushing" an animal). An animal could perform a trick in some situations and may not have the ability to do that trick in other situations. For example, no animal can fetch an item that weighs more that it can lift, but even if it fails to lift an item you command it to fetch, you could have it try to fetch something lighter.

The rules don't give any conditions or range limits for giving an animal a command. Common sense suggests that the animal must be able to see or hear you -- so that it can respond to your gestures or voice. Under most conditions, 60 feet is a practical distance limit for commanding an animal, though you could extend that by using a whistle or something else audible at a greater distance.

- You can push an animal to do something it would not normally do.

As noted previously, you can push an animal to perform a trick it does not know. You also can push an animal to hustle or make a forced march, as noted in the Handle Animal skill description. The rules don't say so, but you also can push an animal to do other things, such as attacking foes it would not normally attack, swimming a rapids, or leaping a wide chasm.

- A trained animal acts on its handler's **initiative** number.

The rules don't specifically mention this, but the handler must act to command the animal, and that has to happen on the handler's turn. You may want to have a trained animal delay its action at least until the handler has a chance to act.

- You can rear a wild animal so that it becomes trainable.

If you find an infant animal, you can raise it to adulthood and domesticate it in the process. You can teach an animal tricks or general purposes while rearing it. See the Handle Animal skill description for details.

- If you have no ranks in Handle Animal, you can make a Charisma check to command or push an animal.

Untrained characters cannot rear or train animals.

## What's Next?

We're out of time for this week. Next week, we'll examine the tricks an animal can learn and what they allow the animal to do.

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## About the Author

**Skip Williams** keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon Magazine* for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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